

President's Column

In a few weeks I will have the chance to make my presidential address for the Society of Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity (SPSMM), Division 51, at the APA convention in New Orleans. New Orleans! Wow, they have been through some stuff down there. Who would have thought last year at this time what the people down there would have to face.

We still hear every day about how the city is coming back yet still needs a great deal of help. I had a teenage patient who went to New Orleans recently on a mission trip tell me that some areas of the city have still not been touched. When I think of New Orleans I think of New York City and the World Trade Center. I had the chance to spend some time there as a volunteer with the American Red Cross in early October of 2001 and what I witnessed has left a lasting impression on me. I recall the sadness and the anger at that time, but what I remember most was the resiliency of the city and people in general. Here was a devastating event, but people were pulling together and already starting to rebuild.

I was stationed at a respite center right by Ground Zero on the midnight to 8 a.m. shift. My assignment was to talk with police officers, firefighters, construction workers and National Guard troops who came in for breaks from their shift on "the pile." That was a pretty emotional experience and I have many memories resulting from it, mostly good ones. One memory stands out above the rest. This had to do with how badly people wanted to help out with the relief effort. I remember individuals who were volunteering on the night shift washing dishes, manning the elevators and doing whatever else was necessary to keep the respite center going knowing that at 8 a.m. they had to return to their regular jobs and put in a full day's work. I remember meeting people from all over the country who had flocked to New York City to contribute in many different capacities simply because they wanted to help. What is that part of people that makes them want to make so many sacrifices to help others in need? I am not sure how to label it, but I am sure glad it is there. This quality helps me stay in balance as I hear about and watch the news of the world such as what is going on in the Middle East. This reminds me to mention my thoughts at this time are with division members Taleb Khairallah, Chen Oren and others who have family and friends in harm's way.

My point here is that I have witnessed tremendous resiliency in both my patients and in disasters, and that I hope and trust this same resiliency will help the city and people of New Orleans who are in the rebuilding process following Hurricane Katrina. I believe that many of us who will be attending the convention this August will get the chance to witness this resiliency first hand.